

A Different Kind of Tension

By Josh Mayer & Catherine Freshley
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Advertising messaging is like party conversations. No one wants to spend time with people who keep talking about themselves. Similarly, people tend to tune out boastful ads that make one tired and lofty claim after another, talking about me, me, me. And just like that interesting person pulling a crowd at a party, brands that engage consumers will find people sticking around. So how do you engage a consumer who is actively trying to ignore advertisements? Consider tension.

Without tension, advertisements tend to be one-way conversations – really monologues – from the brand to the consumer. And just as the braggart at the party painfully learns when everyone walks away, a one-way conversation is not really a conversation at all. It's boring.

Of course, tension has always existed between advertisers and consumers, and it has of late, even increased: consumers are harder to reach and they have gotten wise to the old model of advertising. For years, ads were placed in media channels and were practically guaranteed to reach the consumer. But that was before consumers learned how to escape ads by using DVRs, listening to satellite radio and cancelling their subscriptions to newspapers and magazines in favor of more immediate options such as mobile and web. That was before it was easy to "visit" a store online and see how thousands of consumers like yourself rated a product. Before you could use Twitter or Facebook to simultaneously tell 1,000 of your closest friends how cool – or how uncool – a product or company is.

But we're talking about a different kind of tension.

Rather than suffering from the rise in tension between advertisers and consumers, smart brands are using tension to their advantage by cooking it into their marketing strategies. They know that tension in an ad – whether it's in the design, the message or the choice of medium – is difficult to ignore. And they know that when consumers are not doing their best to

tune out the thousands of ads they get bombarded with every day, they are busy leveraging Web 2.0 for word-of-mouth marketing, actually reaching out to brands that have used tension to engage them. Are these brands taking a risk by opening up a direct dialogue with thousands – perhaps millions – of consumers? Yes, because it's an engagement they don't fully control. But if they can engage consumers in an ongoing conversation, they have started a relationship. And relationships lead to results.

With telecommunications and airline companies handling customer service issues over Twitter and magazines using augmented reality to enliven their print editions, it is clear that companies are finding it valuable to connect with and engage consumers in new ways – that the rewards outweigh the risk. Because, in most cases, if your marketing isn't interesting, there is no conversation.

To engage a consumer in a conversation, consider the super target's journey. The super target is the person who is most likely to become engaged and be a champion of your brand. Map their journey – a day, a week, a year. Where are their touchpoints, what are their trusted sources, what are their passions? This is more art than science, but agencies have reams of data to rely on. Just play with it and hypothesize.

And then find the super target at those touchpoints: where he or she is ready to engage and might even be already talking. If there is conversation, allow the tension of that conversation to present itself in the form of your brand. How can it add to the dialogue? Or better still, can you start your own discussion? Hint: Make the topic a bit off center, a bit controversial. Make it have tension. If the conversation is interesting enough, consumers will join in.

A Different Kind of Tension (cont.)

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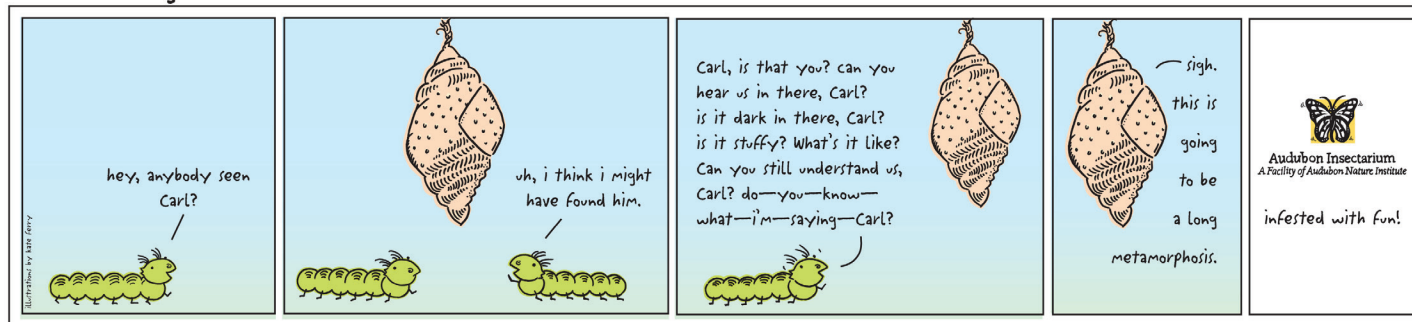
Audubon Nature Institute
Celebrating the Wonders of Nature

Audubon Nature Institute

New Orleans' Audubon Nature Institute opened its 10th venue, The Insectarium, in June 2008. We knew that we would be up against a couple of challenging factors while working to create top-of-mind awareness for the new brand. The economy was tanking, and, let's face it, not everyone is crazy about bugs.

We developed "Bug Bites," the first comic strip advertisement to ever run in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, to drive continued high attendance a couple months after the venue's opening. The personified bugs were likable characters that people could relate to and would want to look for every Sunday during the six-week run. By placing an ad at the top of comics page, we created tension – not to be intrusive, "rather to entertain. And that tension in the choice of medium successfully engaged consumers, helping The Insectarium to break attendance goals.

Audubon Bug Bites



New Orleans Saints

We knew that legions of loyal fans were out there talking about their Saints, so we took the opportunity to collect those conversations on a platform designed to serve not only as a fun gathering place for fans, but also as a marketing tool.

Challenging fans to "prove" their dedication created tension and invited conversation. Saints SuperFans create an avatar of themselves, choosing everything from their accessories to their favorite place to watch the game to the music their avatar will dance to.

Visit saintssuperfan.com

Want to Start a Conversation With Your Consumers?

At Peter A Mayer Advertising, we relish the opportunity to work with clients that are passionate about creating communications that break the mold and produce results. We don't like boring advertising. We like to create tension in our work because it leads to engagement. Engagement with a brand leads to a relationship, which leads to results. And even more than we like tension, we like results.

We will work with you to develop a campaign that gets consumers talking about your brand. If you want to learn more about how you can start a conversation with your consumers, call Mark Mayer, President at 504.210.1215 to start a conversation with us.